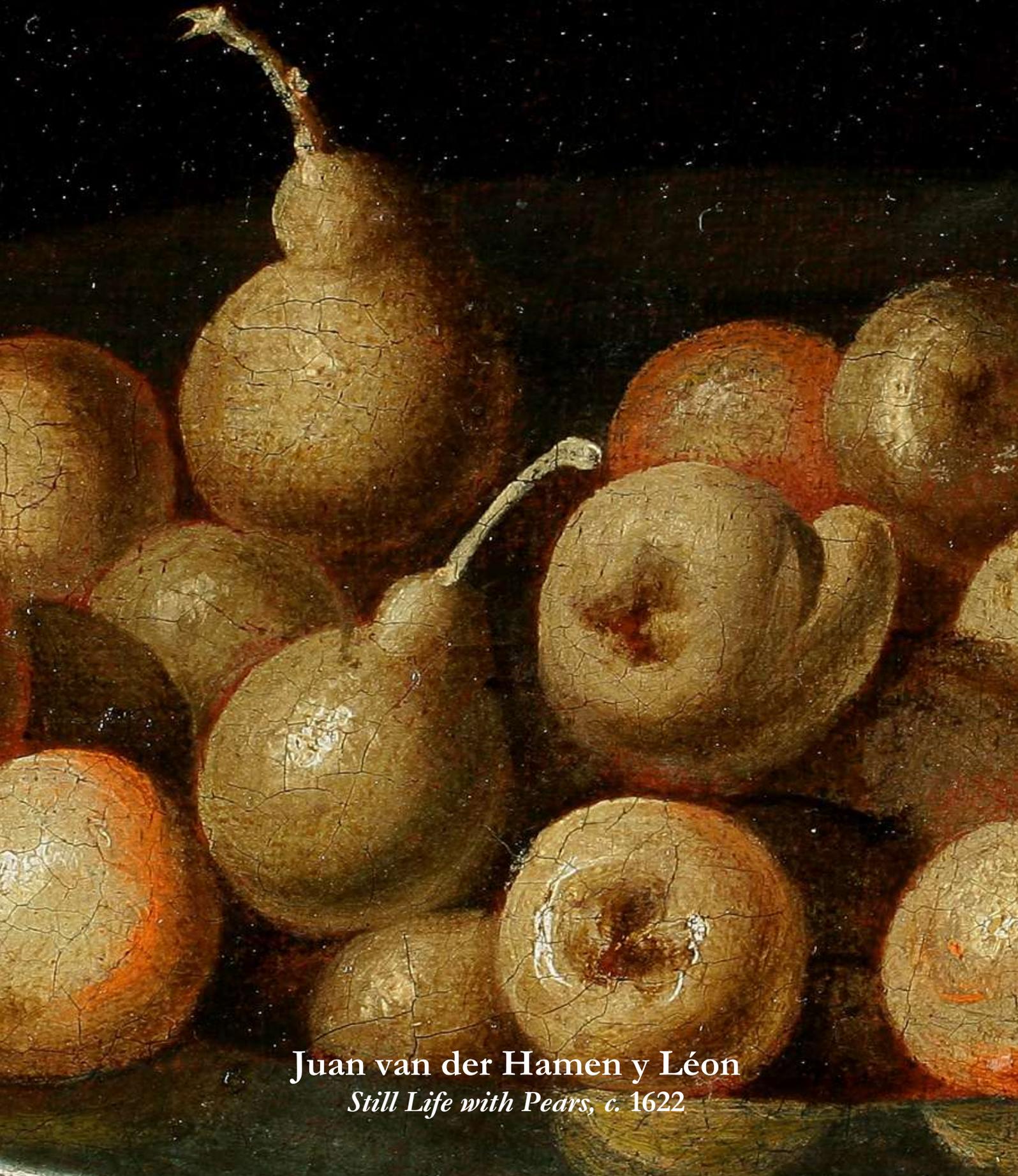


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Juan van der Hamen y León
Still Life with Pears, c. 1622

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JUAN VAN DER HAMEN Y LEÓN
(Madrid 1596 - 1631)

STILL LIFE WITH PEARS, c. 1622

oil on canvas
21 x 27.8 cm; 8 1/4 x 11 in

Provenance

Private collection, Madrid.

Comparative Literature

- P. Cherry, *Arte y naturaleza. El bodegón español en el siglo de oro*, Madrid, 1999.
W. Jordan, *Juan van der Hamen*, Ann Arbor, 2002.
W. Jordan, *Juan van der Hamen y León and the Court of Madrid*, New Haven & London, 2005.
W. Jordan and P. Cherry, *Spanish Still Life from Velazquez to Goya*, London, 1995



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This delightful ensemble of lush summer fruits is typical of the small still lives which the accomplished Spanish artist Juan van der Hamen painted for sale to private collectors.¹ According to the scholar William Jordan, still-life compositions like this one became so famous even in the artist's lifetime "that anyone seeing them would immediately know whose it was".²

The work studied here adopts the window-setting device employed by the illustrious pioneer of Spanish still-life painting, Juan Sánchez Cotán. But whilst Sánchez Cotán described his objects with an almost ascetic naturalism, van der Hamen selected objects with a luxuriance appealing to his courtly clientele.

Beyond the immediate appeal of its subject, the painting displays the carefully calibrated structure and detailed surface that define Van der Hamen's most successful *bodegones* of the early 1620s. A low ledge cuts the composition horizontally, supporting a broad metal platter, most plausibly tin or pewter, typical of 16th- and 17th-century domestic settings. A raking light from the left models each form with minute attention to contour and skin, catching on the finely placed highlights that ring the vessel's lip and glitter on the convexities of the fruit. They seem to "settle" into a collective rhythm, their curved silhouettes echoing one another and the elliptical sweep of the dish.³ This poise is heightened by the deliberate restraint of the palette, olive-green, straw, and muted ochre enlivened by small, coral-toned passages on several pears, so that colour serves structure rather than competing with it.

Van der Hamen's *Plate with Plums and Morello Cherries* (c. 1631, Museo del Prado, Fig. 1) is identical in size and reprises a similar metal dish; in both works the light spreads softly from the left and enables the scrupulous rendering of the fruits' form, firmness, texture and colour - attesting to the artist's preoccupation with exact description and offering the viewer, then and now, the appearance of reality.

¹ W. Jordan, *Juan van der Hamen y León and the Court of Madrid*, New Haven & London, 2005, p.279.

² *Ibid.* p. 85.

³ See J. J. Luna, J. J., *El bodegón español en el Prado: de Van der Hamen a Goya*, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid 2008, p. 60.

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Fig. 1. Juan van der Hamen y León, *Plate with Plums and Morello Cherries*, c. 1631, oil on canvas, 20x28cm. Madrid, Museo del Prado.

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